**Piotr Il'ich Tchaikovsky.**

Tchaikovsky was not a child prodigy as Mozart, he did not appear as a great talent during his young years - nether as a pianist, nor as a composer. His life in music was not smooth and predictable. Tchaikovsky is regarded as the most popular Russian composer, and even "the most Russian" composer, though he was not like Glinka consecrated to the service of nationality, and no doubt was influenced by German, Italian and French composers. Even among the other quite famous Russian contemporaries, "The Mighty Five", as they are known\*\*\*, he stays aside: his music was considered too Western, though it had been written at the rising time of the national movement.

Tchaikovsky was born in a middle class family of a mine inspector. From the early years his life was filled with melodies from Mozart, Rossini, Bellini, Donicetti, played on the orcestrina by his father. The boy, very likely taught piano by his mother, showed the perfect pitch and remarkable musical memory. But his parents did not pay attention to his musical capabilities. One time, however, once, he was so engaged with a rhythm, tapping with his fingers on the windowpane that he broke the window, cutting his hand. This incident moved his parents to engage a music tutor for young Piotr.

Tchaikovsky's musical lessons were not very regular. At the age of nine he was sent to the School of Jurisprudence in St. Petersburg, where he studied until the 1861. During these years musical activities of the young composer were minimal, though he did go to the performances of very famous musicians, such as Clara Schumann, and also frequented the Italian opera, which was very popular that time. Outside the school he took music lessons on Sundays from the pianist Rudolph Kundinger, but the teacher discovered no particular talent in his pupil. Nobody could see in young Tchaikovsky what he would later become. His classmates remembered that they were amazed by his improvisation on the themes from fashionable opera, but mostly by the musical tricks, he could demonstrate, like the guessing keys and playing the piano covered by a towel.

After his graduation from the School of Jurisprudence, Tchaikovsky began his civil service in the administrative division of the Department of Justice in St. Petersburg, trying to find his niche in this field. According to his brother Modest, who has written the most detailed biography of the composer, the first indication of his intention to change his career is dated 1861, when in the letter to his sister Aleksandra he wrote: "Papa insists that it is not that late for me to become an artist? But the fact is that even if I do have some talent, it is probably already impossible to develop it. They have made a clerk out of me, and a poor one at that: I try to improve as much as I can, to take my work more seriously - and now to study thoroughbass at the same time!"

That time was a crucial moment in Russian music life. In 1857 the Russian Musical society was formed, which soon brought the classical music out of the aristocratic salons to public. There were many musical classes opened for general education, which of course gave rise to professional education as well.> Tchaikovsky was told about these classes by his cousin, a young officer in the Horse Grenadiers, who once mentioned that he "can make the transition from one key to any other in no more than three chords"; and demonstrated immediately. "I considered myself more talented than he musically, but at the same time I was unable to do such a thing", he told to his friend Mikhail Kashkin, "When I asked where he had learned this, I found out that the Russian Musical Society offered classes in music theory where one could learn all these clever tricks; I went immediately to those classes and signed up to audit one taught by Nikolay Zaremba". It was the turning point of his life: on September 1862, Tchaikovsky was among the first students of new opened St. Petersburg Conservatory.

The classes on orchestration and composition with one of the most significant musician of hat time, the director of St. Petersburg Conservatory Anton Rubinstain, became the centerpiece of Tchaikovsky's studies. His teaching was improvisational, and even having not very wide musical outlook, Rubinstain was not only a great pianist and composer, "but also a man of rare nobility, sincere, honest, magnanimous, align to any baseness or vulgarity, with a clear, straightforward mind? as a teacher, he was incomparable?"\*\*\*

Anton Rubinstain recognized an outstanding talent in his pupil and wanted to encourage him. He arranged to bring one of the first serious work of his student to the attention of Johann Strauss. The performance of " Characteristic dances"\*\*\*, incorporated later to Tchaikovsky's first opera "The Voevoda" was, indeed, the first public performance of any of his works.

Before even graduating, Tchaikovsky had already composed the Overture in F and the String quartet movement in B flat, both of which were performed in student concerts at the conservatory. As his graduation work, Tchaikovsky proposed his cantata on the text of Schiller's ode "An die Freude" (the same text as in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony). Reaction on it was almost uniformly unfavorable. The compose Aleksandr Serov was disappointing, commenting, "No, the cantata is not good. I expected much more from Tchaikovsky." In his sarcastic review, the composer and musical critic Cezar Cui asserted, that "the composer Mr. Tchaikovsky is utterly week?and if he had any talent, then somewhere at least it would have broken the chains of the conservatory."

During these years, Tchaikovsky worked as teaching assistant in a harmony class. Several weeks before his graduation, he was invited by Anton Rubinstain's brother Nikolay to teach at the newly founded Moscow Conservatory. Tchaikovsky, a vary soft and charming person, very quickly became a member of musical family, attracting people not only by his promising talant, but mostly by his character. But his creative efforts still were not still productive. Early in 1866 he began work on his first symphony "Winter Daydreams". It was time of endless depression, enforced by insomnia. The abnormal labor was killing his sleep, and sleepless nights were sapping his energy and paralyzing his creative power. In the middle of July, as his doctor said, Tchaikovsky was even close to insanity. In September, he showed the unfinished yet score to his former teachers - Anton Rubinstain and Nikolay Zaremba. To his dismay both men disliked of the symphony. But the "Moscow Rubinstain", Nikolay liked it and in December played the scherzo from it at a concert of the Russian Musical Society. The full performance of this work in February 1868 was a resounding success, which brought it in the row of one of the first symphonies written by Russian composer. "Winter Daydreams", filled with folk motives, already showed Tchaikovsky's own style. It was his first triumph, but aware of number of weaknesses in the work, Tchaikovsky decided to rewrite it. Encouraged by his first successful works, Tchaikovsky began to work on his first opera, with the libretto of the famous Russian playwright Aleksandr Ostrovsky. He composed with great speed and enthusiasm, but in his inexperience he made a number of scenographic errors. "I really wrote music to a given text, without a view to the immense difference between symphony and opera in terms of style". The first performance, which took place at the Bolshoy Theater, was not vary successful - the National opera was not as popular as Italian. Russian composers were not even permitted the advantage of a full orchestra and the second-rate singers were considered good enough. Even so, the opera was performed in all about ten times. Afterwards Tchaikovsky burned the score, perhaps from disappointing. But some parts of this fist opera would be included in his later opera "The Oprichnik".

Tchaikovsky's next work, the fantasia "Fatum", which joined the list of his failures, was performed in March 1869 with some success. And again, unsatisfied by it Tchaikovsky destroyed the score.

The end of his failures was soon to come. In the spring of 1869 Balakirev discussed with young talented composer the plan of his next work - Fantastic Overture "Romeo and Juliet". They talked about all the details very carefully. Later Kashkin wrote about this talk: "The plan, adapted to sonata form, was as follows: First, an introduction of a religious character?, followed by Allegro in b minor (Balakirev suggested most of the tonalities), was to depict the enmity between the Montagues and Capulets? Then was to follow the love of Romeo and Juliet (second subject in D flat major), succeeded by elaboration of both subjects?." Tchaikovsky came from his vacation in September with the almost finished score. But the evil fate did not forget the young composer. On the evening of forth of March 1870, Nikolay Rubinstain appeared in the hall of Moscow Conservatory to conduct his work, which was predicted to be a great success. But he was received the fantastic demonstration of students against him, after an incident with a student of Conservatory, resented a reprimand. "Romeo and Juliet" was published at 1871 in Berlin and indeed became one of the most popular classical masterpieces. \*\*\*

The next seven years (1871-1877) were more or less successful in Tchaikovsky's creative work. His next two operas were not good ones: "Undina" was rejected by Theatral Direction, "Snow maiden" (Snegurochka") did not have success (not like the Rimsky-Korsakov opera of the same theme). But at the same time, Tchaikovsky composed such famous works as the Second Symphony ("A Little Russian", almost fully consisting of variations on Russian folks melodies), Third Symphony, the opera "Vakula the Smith", which had significant success in Russia and Europe, but was remodeled later into the opera "Cherevichek"; the opera "The Oprichnik" - the great advance of his previous operas "Undina" and "The Voevoda"; the ballet "Swan Lake", the Fantasia "Franceska di Rimini" etc.

To this period belongs the Piano Concerto in b flat minor. M.Kashkin gives an interesting story of the birth of his work: "Tchaikovsky, who had long had it in his mind to compose a pinoforte concerto for Nikolay Rubinstain, set about this work in the winter of 1874? The invention of passages for piano combined with orchestra did not come easily to him: but in February 1875 the composition was quite ready. Tchaikovsky took the finished score to Nikolay Rubinstain, and the title page was inscribed the dedication to him? But he, it appeared, was disagreeably surprised that Tchaikovsky - not being a pianist - had not asked his advise about the piano part." As Tchaikovsky later wrote in his letter, Rubinstain particularly said, that "it was impossible to play, that the passages were hackneyed, clumsy, and so awkward that there was no way even to correct them, that as a composition it was bad, vulgar." But Tchaikovsky decided to publish the concerto without alteration a single note. Only the dedication was replaced by one to Hans von Bulow, who performed for the it first time in Boston with a great success.

The year of 1877 was the most crucial for Tchaikovsky. In the August he married Antonina Miljukova. She was one of his students, who had written him a confession of love. "The letter had been written so genuinely, so warmly, that I decided to answer it." "I am marring the girl not particular young but entirely respectable and who has one main virtue: she is in love with me like a cat?" On the day of marriage he wrote several bravura letters to his friends, informing them of this event. But on the train to St. Petersburg, where they wanted to spent their fisrt days together, he was "ready to scream from the sobs that were suffocating me." The marriage appeared as a real disaster for his life. Later, in a letter to relatives, he wrote: "?She has agreed with absolutely everything and will never displeased? I have reserved for myself complete freedom of action?" He had only one wish - to die. It a week he tried to commit suicide - standing in cold Moscow river water for one reason: to catch cold and to die from pneumonia. The main dilemma in his life at this point was Tchaikovsky's homosexuality. During his years in the boys School of Jurisprudence, he was involved in homosexual relations with other students. Such an experience, even if it takes place in the most important period of psychological development, does not necessarily lead to the future homosexuality. Tchaikovsky most likely did not consider himself as exclusively homosexual and probably saw his marriage as a possible solution to his sexual problems. Maybe his extremely sensitiveness played a very important role, which he inherits from his father. From his early years he was very hysteric, nervous and susceptible. Many of his mental problem probably were genetically passed to him: at least one of his ancestors on his mother's side suffered from epilepsy and Tchaikovsky might have displayed, albeit in a lesser form, certain secondary appearance of this disorder (all his "little apoplectic fits"). In the early years he was found to have a spinal cord problem, which, as the doctors said was the reason for his extremely sensitivity and nervousness. These factors combined together made his life very unhappy and unsatisfactory. At the same time, maybe they made his music more sentimental, more melodious. Herman Laroche, a musical critic and one of the Tchaikovsky's best friends, and other critics would later casually suggest, that even Tchaikovsky's music bore the imprint of his "feminine" nature. This was a description the composer himself strongly disliked.

During this very hard period of his life, Tchaikovsky wrote two of his greatest works: the opera "Evgeni Onegin" and the Forth Symphony. The brilliant Violin Concerto also comes from the late 1870s.

Some time before, around 1876, a wealthy widow appeared in Tchaikovsky's live. Nadezda von Meck, a patroness of art, gave an income to the composer to cover his basic life expenses, which allowed him to leave his teaching position in the Conservatory and compose. They never met, but very soon they became very good and close friends. Fourteen years later, Mrs. von Meck suddenly stopped financing Tchaikovsky without any possibility to continue their friendship - a blow from with Tchaikovsky never fully recovered.

In 1893 Tchaikovsky died from cholera.

The last years of Tchaikovsky's life were very productive. "The Queen of Spades", "The Sleeping Beauty", the symphonic poem "Manfred", the lyric opera in one act "Iolanta", the famous two act fairy ballet "The Nutcracker", the Sixth Symphony? - this is far from the full list of his late works. The last works did not need the approval of critics. He became famous not only in Russia, but in Europe and in America, as a incomparable master-orchestrator, as a genius in creating melodies. The last symphony - "Pathetic", is the most melancholy among them all (each of his symphonies has a definite coloring. The Second was written in national traditions, the Third - by influents of Schumann's enthusiasm, the Forth is the only humorous one, the Fifth, which is regarded as the most weak one has religious feelings). There are many critical opinions with respect to his works: in his symphonic, as well as in his instrumental work one can find a weakness: being ultramelodiaous, able to find the expressive musical ideas in his work, he seems to find difficulties in quitting them; the criticism of his romances, that Tchaikovsky regarded the music as the most important element of the song.

But even agreeing with this critics, it is impossible not to acknowledge Tchaikovsky as a one of the most significant composers in history, whose music is still very popular and beloved by people in the world.

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